

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Hip Hop, the President and Gay Marriage

Ulli K. Ryder, Ph.D · Thursday, May 24th, 2012

A curious thing has been happening lately. Hip hop artists have come out publicly in support of gay marriage. Many of those who support gay marriage cite President Obama's [recent statement](#) that gay marriage is about "expanded rights and responsibilities [for] everybody" and that gay marriage "doesn't weaken families; it strengthens families." So why should we care that hip hop stars such as [Jay-Z](#), [T.I.](#), [Ice Cube](#) and [50 Cent](#) endorse gay marriage? And does this endorsement spell the beginning of the end of homophobia in hip hop and in our country?

Hip hop has long been vilified as [homophobic and sexist](#) – and many of the artists mentioned above have been accused of anti-gay and anti-female lyrics. The latest incarnation of homophobia comes with the insertion of the phrase "[no homo](#)" after lyrics, just to make sure listeners know that the speaker/singer is absolutely not gay. Gay rappers do exist ([see this](#)) but none have gained the prominence of a Jay-Z or 50 Cent.

The well-crafted public personas based on hyper-masculinity and violence of rappers such as Ice Cube and 50 Cent are perfect examples of anti-gay sentiment in hip hop. Significantly, 50 Cent was discovered by [Eminem](#) – no stranger to charges of homophobia, extreme violence and sexism himself. The first lines of 50's *[That Ain't Gangsta](#)*:

How you gonna take this? like a Man or a bitch?
you gon' get it on nigga or you gon' snitch?
I represent niggas in the hood gettin' rich
man, I stack chips and I unload clips

So what's going on here; why such a startling change of attitude? Maybe we can give some credit to maturity – Ice Cube's [NWA](#) days are a quarter century in his past. He's now a husband, father and star (or co-star) of mainstream films like the Barbershop series (2002, 2004), Three Kings (1999) and the family-friendly Are We There Yet? (2005). Jay-Z and wife Beyonce (with whom he has been in a relationship for almost a decade) just welcomed their first child and Jay-Z has worked with the UN to raise awareness the global water shortage. 50 Cent has credited the [birth of his son](#) for turning his life around and getting him off of the self-destructive path he was on. In addition to other business ventures, 50 has begun an initiative to provide food for undernourished people in Africa. The youngest of the group above, T.I. has more recently been in [trouble with the law](#), but he is also a father, husband and has donated his time and money to help victims of Hurricane Katrina and inmates at Paulding Detention Center in Atlanta, GA. It appears that with age and experience has come increased responsibility and (perhaps) a more tolerant attitude

towards the gay community and an awareness of connections between anti-black racism and homophobia.

President Obama's change of heart also clearly inspired the hip hop stars to speak out. This may seem unimportant but it is a huge deal. The black community has a long history of intolerance when it comes to homosexuality. [Seventy percent](#) of black Californians voted to ban gay marriage in that state and the [black church](#) has often condemned gays and lesbians – shunned them, ignored them, railed against them as sinners. President Obama's announcement supporting gay marriage must be viewed within this context – he spoke not just as our President but as a member of a black Christian community. And hip hop stars must also be viewed this way. They are not just celebrities but celebrities who are part of two communities that have been traditionally homophobic: a black community and hip hop.

Importantly, their “support” is couched in terms that do not necessarily support gay people generally but only support the right of gays to marry. Jay-Z said anti-gay marriage laws are discriminatory; Ice Cube said that since he's already married he doesn't care what other people do. TI said much the same thing. Only 50 Cent went further – supporting not just gay marriage but gays more generally (although this is debatable). According to [allhiphop.com](#), 50 said:

“I'm cool. I would like people to actually be happy. Technically, I don't see where it fits into any religion. The Bible that they would read to marry you, it doesn't have anything in it that says same-sex. If it does, then I would like someone to point out that interpretation. I've encouraged same-sex activities. I've engaged in fetish areas a couple times. I'm for it. I'm wondering if I'm bad for promoting it when the president says it's fine.”

Unsurprisingly, fans are scratching their heads at this statement – and are also insisting that he was referring to engaging in threesomes with two other women. A man with two women upholds heterosexual male virility in a way that imagining 50 with another man (or two) does not.

It is possible to support gay marriage as a right that should be granted to everyone and still harbor anti-gay sentiments. Comfortable in their careers and personal relationships, the hip hop stars who support gay marriage are not interested in regulating the personal lives of other people. But that doesn't mean that homophobia will disappear from hip hop any time soon. [Kanye West's](#) 2009 epiphany that his homophobia might actually hurt his gay cousin, for example, hasn't stopped the star from making it clear that he would [never go to a gay bar](#) (lest he be mistaken for gay or get hit on?).

Prominent hip hop stars supporting gay marriage is a big deal. But support for gay marriage is not the same as being anti-homophobic. This is the real lesson to be learned from hip hop – allowing all people to marry doesn't mean we love or accept all people equally. And that's not a hip hop problem, it's a universal one.

This entry was posted on Thursday, May 24th, 2012 at 1:07 am and is filed under [Music](#)

You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can leave a response, or [trackback](#) from your own site.